

across Montana and the Dakotas. In some cases, these subdivisions are adjacent to public lands. In 1999, BLM Field Offices completed a Wildland/Urban Interface Risk Questionnaire for areas adjacent to public lands. The results of the questionnaire indicate there are areas where medium to high potential for escaped fire, medium to high potential for loss of life or property and medium to high level of community support for dealing with fires.

The available attitude information on prescribed burns suffers from problems with definitions regarding the types of fires being assessed. The recently published "US Forest Service Communications Strategy: Prescribed Burning" summarizes the available attitudinal information this way: "...evidence exists suggesting the public and policy makers may not always understand or agree with the many issues surrounding prescribed burning. Direct and indirect research shows a pattern of growing public support of these policies; however, national surveys conducted since the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Fire of 1988 have demonstrated a lag between policy implementation and public acceptance.... In addition, public and policy maker support of prescribed burning is heavily influenced by issues relating to smoke and health; perceived degradation to ecosystem health; impacts of aesthetics, water and wildlife; and prescribed burns escaping control."

Since the Montana fires of 2000, additional attention and resources have been directed toward public attitudes regarding prescribed burns. Keeping apprised of and incorporating the evolving attitudinal information on prescribed burns can contribute to the success of these projects.

**Conclusion:** The movement of people into rural areas is expected to continue during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which contributes to the emerging public opinion on prescribed burning on the public lands adjacent to rural/urban interface areas. Although not much attitudinal information is available on prescribed burns, there are some identifiable relationships between public opinion and the perceived image of prescribed burning. These issues include smoke impacts on health; the perceived effects of fire on the ecosystem; effects on aesthetics, water, and wildlife; and the possibility of prescribed burns escaping control and becoming wildfires. The public interest in hazardous fuels reduction generated by the fires of 2000 should contribute to an increased attention to public opinion regarding fires and prescribed burning, which will be useful in future projects and policies.

## **Relationship Between Short-term Uses and Long-term Productivity**

Fire is a critical natural process that helps maintain healthy ecosystems and guards against natural disasters. While the total number of acres burned by wildland fire under either alternative may be essentially the same in the short term, eventually the severity of wildland fires will be reduced as Alternative B is implemented and hazardous fuels are reduced. Controlled fires on rangeland can promote seasonal growth of forage and a mosaic of wildlife habitats. Low-intensity fires in forest lands clear understory ladder fuels that could otherwise climb into tree tops and cause devastation. Prescribed fires conducted under specified conditions would eventually improve the health of the natural landscape and reduce the hazardous build-up of vegetation. Prescribed fires and other hazardous fuel reduction projects would help reduce the risk and devastation of raging wildland fire.

## **CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

### **Public Notices, External and Internal Scoping**

While BLM was trying to determine how best to approach a fire management update we consulted with other resource management agencies as well as our partners in fire suppressions efforts. We also conducted extensive internal scoping to determine how best to approach this. Contacts were identified at each Field Office and interdisciplinary team meetings were conducted at the Field Offices to identify preliminary issues and special areas of concern, to discuss appropriate methods of consultation and coordination, and to conduct preliminary discussions of alternatives and impacts. These efforts are summarized below.

### **Chronology of Consultation and Coordination Related to Fire Management Planning**

#### **1998**

January	Bleiker process for public participation initiated in each District Office.
March 18	Letter sent to Northern Rockies Coordinating representatives explaining how we intended to approach fire management plan updates.
March 24	Follow-up conference call with Northern Rockies Coordinating representatives to

	discuss coordination with other agencies and the public.	Oct. 21	Letter from State Director sent to 115 other federal, state, and local agencies announcing the fire management planning process and offering to coordinate as appropriate.
April 7	Met with Bob Meuchel (FS regional fire planner) and Richard Hafanfeld to clarify concerns, answer questions, and gather information.	Oct. 30	Letter from Fire Management Officer sent to 48 fire wardens announcing the fire management planning process and asking for issues and concerns.
April 16	Met with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MDFW&P) to explain fire management plan updates.	Nov. 4	Briefed the BLM post fire conference on status of fire management planning.
April 20	ID Team meeting in Billings.	Dec. 2	Lewistown FO briefed Petroleum County Commissioners
April 27	ID Team meeting in Belle Fourche	Dec. 7	Lewistown FO briefed Chouteau County Commissioners
May 1-3	Attended Montana Fire Wardens annual meeting to meet with fire wardens and agency contacts from across Montana.	Dec. 8	Lewistown FO briefed Fergus County Commissioners
May 7	ID Team meeting in Butte (Butte/Missoula)	Dec. 15	Briefed the BLM State Management Team on status of fire management planning.
May 13-15	Attended Smoke Management Workshop sponsored by Western States Air Resource Council to discuss successful smoke management plans.	Dec. 15	Responses from letters and contacts include: general public (524), agencies (47), counties (1), fire wardens (17), and county commissioners (6).
May 18	Toured a prior prescribed burn and another planned burn with representatives of BLM, MDFW&P, DNRC (State Lands).	December	Lewistown FO sent letters, maps, and briefing statements to Hill County and Judith Basin County.
May 26	ID Team meeting in Dillon	<b><u>1999</u></b>	
May 28	ID Team meeting in Lewistown (Lewistown, Great Falls, Malta)	Jan. 12	Lewistown FO briefed Blaine County Commissioners
June 10	ID Team meeting in Miles City (Miles City, North Dakota)	Feb 24	Field Manager Tim Murphy was on a panel discussing "The Federal Wildland Fire Policy and the Eastern Montana Experience" at the Montana Association of Counties Mid-Winter Meeting in Helena MT.
Sept. 9	Briefed MT congressional staffs about fire management planning	March 10	Explained Montana approach for fire planning and NEPA compliance to BLM and other agency experts at the Fire and Resources-Implementing the Federal Wildland Fire Policy Workshop.
Sept	Federal Register Notice of Intent to prepare a NEPA document and possible RMP amendments related to fire management planning.	May 12	Provided an update on fire planning and NEPA compliance at the Spring Fire Operations Meeting.
Oct.	5067 letters from project leader sent to the general public announcing the fire management planning process and asking for issues, concerns, and a response from those who want to stay on mailing list.		
Oct.	Customized letters sent to County Commissioners from each Field Office Manager announcing fire management planning and offering to provide a briefing.		

## Scoping Comments

In our letters and contacts with the public, agencies, and state and local officials we asked for comments and concerns by November 30, 1998. Comments from the public included concerns about fuels build-up and suggestions that the BLM have more timber sales, that the BLM should pay local fire departments to fight fires, that prescribed burns be used more often where there is fuels build-up and to control pine seedlings, that dams should be

fixed to provide a source of water to fight fires, that farmers and ranchers should be allowed to fight fires and that the BLM should provide more equipment. Prescribed fire was also described as a good management tool that should be used in managing the ecosystem.

County commissioners and fire wardens expressed general interest in fire management planning and specific interest in fuel build-up around Lead, South Dakota.